



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20314-1000

NOV 10 2010

Reply to the
Attention of

Northwestern Division
Regional Integration Team

Honorable Christine Gregoire
Governor of Washington
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, Washington 98504-0002

Dear Governor Gregoire:

Thank you for the letter dated October 4, 2010, regarding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) draft policy for requesting variances from vegetation standards for levees.

The Northwestern Division of the Corps has begun the first steps toward initiating a round table for developing a regional framework to address vegetation management in the northwest. Several meetings have been held recently with the Corps' Omaha, Kansas City, Portland, Walla Walla and Seattle Districts, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries (NOAA) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to determine the best approach for engaging the region's stakeholders.

The purpose and intent of the round table and framework will be to collaboratively and creatively develop clear guidance for non-Federal sponsors for vegetation management for levees. Where Endangered Species Act (ESA) and/or Native American interests do not exist, the round table will develop a plan to achieve the Corps national vegetation management standard. Where ESA and Native American interests do exist, the round table will identify areas for vegetation variance requests or opportunities for sponsors to make system improvements such as setting back levees.

Guidance developed in the regional framework will focus on individual levee systems, but may consider leveraging the approach developed for one system, to address similar levee systems and/or systems in a particular drainage basin, or basins as appropriate. Headquarters supports such a regional framework approach.

As a starting point, a list of P.L. 84-99 program levee systems in the State of Washington where endangered species or critical habitat exist is being identified. Due to the intense interest in the Puget Sound area, we are considering the Green and Cedar River Basins (King County) as a starting place for holding a round table and beginning development of a regional framework. The proposal is to start with a manageable area and then expand from there to other river basins within the State of Washington. A round table meeting is tentatively scheduled for November 2010.

Regarding the final vegetation variance request policy, the release has been postponed to ensure a thorough review and consideration of the public comments we have received on the policy; further coordinate with the resource agencies at the national level; and correspond with release of levee vegetation research being performed by our Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC).

Our Northwestern Division is committed to working collaboratively with the stakeholders in the State of Washington to identify solutions that result in reliable levee systems while retaining ecological integrity. If you need additional information, please feel free to contact me or you may also contact Ms. Lisa Fleming, Deputy Chief of Civil Works, Northwestern Division Regional Integration Team at (202) 761-4605.

Sincerely,



R. L. Van Antwerp
Lieutenant General, US Army
Commanding General